



Religious Patronage as an Instrument of 'Soft' Political Power during War: Russian Donations to Orthodox Communities in the Ottoman Empire

Yuliana Boycheva

¹ Institute for Mediterranean Studies

boycheva@ims.forth.gr

ABSTRACT

One of the basic features of the propaganda mechanism of the Russian Empire's policy in the Balkans between the 18th-early 20th centuries was the support and consolidation of the Orthodox communities within the Ottoman Empire. The emphasis on the common Orthodox identity of Russians and Orthodox Christians and Russia's role as their protector formed the ideological background of this policy.

One of the research objectives of the RICONTRANS project was to study the implementation of this patronage policy during the numerous Russo-Turkish wars of the 18th and 19th centuries.

The study of written sources and the identification of numerous artefacts (liturgical utensils, books, icons) in Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania attest three categories of donations: a) official gifts provided by state/church institutions; b) private offerings made by warriors or the clergy; c) foundation and equipment of memorial churches in honor of the fallen Russian soldiers in the war of 1877-1878.

Their analysis shows that they functioned not only as objects of worship, but also as 'tools' of soft political power, representing one of the many 'invisible' aspects of war in the modern era.